

# Bear Country: Learning to Live with Bears

## Introduction

The black bear is a symbol of Minnesota's wilderness. Conflicts between people and bears have increased as more people build homes and cabins and recreate in northern Minnesota. Conflicts between people and bears arise when bears damage personal property, beehives, livestock and agricultural crops.

Bears are common throughout northern Minnesota. Although bears live primarily in forested areas they sometimes wander into cities and towns.

A bear will take advantage of any foods available and will attempt to eat anything that resembles food in look, smell or taste. When natural foods such as nuts, meat berries, insects and tender vegetation are scarce, bears search actively for anything to eat. This is when bears most often come in contact with people. When bears find a source of food they will usually return regularly.

## Bears and People

Bears and people meet under a variety of circumstances. Most bears are wary of people and will usually leave when encountered. Although seeing a bear can be a memorable experience, some people are frightened when they encounter these animals.

Bears can become a nuisance when they visit homes, resorts, campgrounds and restaurants. Although some bears become used to people, they are still wild animals no matter how "tame" they may appear. People must always be cautious around bears since they may react unpredictably.

## Solving Bear Problems

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has the responsibility to reduce conflicts between bears and people. This is important to avoid unnecessary loss of bears and to maintain public support for sound bear management.

### The DNR manages bears by:

Providing quality bear habitat through sound forestry practices.  
Conducting research to increase knowledge of bear biology.  
Educating the public on how to live with bears.  
Assisting people with bear problems.  
Controlling the bear population with hunting seasons.  
People share in the responsibility to avoid conflicts with bears. Learning effective measures to prevent bear problems will help both bears and people. The best way to avoid bear problems is to not attract them in the first place.

## Homes and Cabins

Bears are attracted to homes and cabins by garbage and bird feeders. Pet food, charcoal grills, fruit trees and gardens may also attract bears. Once a bear finds food around your home it will likely return.

Never feed bears--They will associate people with food and may become a problem.

To minimize bear problems on your property:

Bird feeders and bears DON'T MIX.

Reduce garbage odors. Rinse food cans and wrappers before disposal.

Compost vegetable scraps.

Keep meat scraps in your freezer until garbage pickup day.

Wash garbage cans regularly and use lime to cut odors.

Keep garbage cans in a bear-proof container or in a garage until the morning of pickup.

Remove bird feeders in the spring. If you persist in feeding bears during the summer, remove seed, suet, and hummingbird feeders at night.

Keep pet food inside.

Keep barbecue grills and picnic tables clean.

Use an energized fence\* to keep bears out of beehives, sweet corn, fruit trees and berry patches. Barking dogs, bright lights and noisemakers will sometimes discourage bears from coming into an area.

\* An energized fence is powered by a low-impedance, high-voltage energizer which provides a short-duration, high-energy impulse.

### **If a bear comes into your yard:**

Bears in trees should be left alone.

Don't panic! Don't shoot! Don't approach it!

Learn to tolerate bears. Many bears are killed or injured when not causing problems.

Most bears fear people and will leave when they see you. If a bear woofs, snaps its jaws, slaps the ground or brush, or bluff charges, you are too close!

Back away slowly.

Go inside and wait for the bear to leave.

If a bear refuses to leave:

Make loud noises or throw something to scare it away.

Always allow the bear an escape route.

If the bear is treed:

Leave it alone!

The bear will usually go away when it feels safe.

Have people leave the area. Remove your dog from the area.

Camping and Outdoor Activities

When outdoors, you may encounter a bear, especially while camping. If you are planning a camping trip to bear country, a telephone call to inquire about bear activities is recommended.

If you confront a bear while in the outdoors, remain calm. Don't panic!

To reduce the chances of bear problems:

### **If a bear comes into camp:**

Move to another campsite if fresh bear sign is present.

Never have food in your tent.

Use canned and dried foods to minimize food odors.

Store foods out of a bear's reach.

Use air-tight or bear-proof containers.

Burn waste paper in your campfire.

Do not burn or bury food scraps!

Remove all garbage and fish remains from camp every evening.

Seeing bears can be very enjoyable. However, having a bear in camp can lead to problems. If a problem becomes serious, the bear may be killed unnecessarily.

### **If a bear comes into camp:**

Don't feed it. Scare it away.

Make loud noises, bang pans, yell or use air horns.

Don't be gentle! Chase it away.

Throw rocks or pieces of firewood or use a slingshot.

If a bear makes threatening sounds, stands upright or bluff charges, you are too close. These actions can be unnerving, however, the bear can almost always be chased away.

Spray repellents containing capsaicin (hot pepper liquid) are available to discourage bold bears. These repellents are effective and will not injure a bear's eyes or make the bear aggressive. CAUTION! Care must be taken when using these products. Be sure to follow label instructions.

Resorts, Campgrounds and Restaurants

Bears can be attracted to establishments that have food because of odors and garbage.

**Problems may arise when:**

People are in close contact with bears.

Bears damage personal property.

Bears become dependent on a food source.

Bears scatter garbage.

**To help reduce bear problems:**

Use bear-proof cans and dumpsters

Move cans and dumpsters away from areas used by people.

Pick up garbage and fish remains promptly every evening.

Wash cans and dumpsters frequently.

Use lime to cut odors.

**Teach people to:**

NOT FEED BEARS

NOT STORE FOOD IN TENTS!

Store food out of site in a car trunk or cabin.

Rinse containers before disposal or recycling. These precautions will help reduce bear problems.

When you find a system that works stay with it.

**Agriculture**

Landowners sometimes experience bear problems with livestock, crops, orchards, berry patches, and beehives.

To control problems: Corral animals close to buildings at night. Promptly bury dead animals or take them to a rendering plant. Eliminate on-farm garbage dumps. Encourage hunting in problem areas Monitor crops to detect problems early.

Because of potentially large financial losses, bears are especially troublesome in orchards and beehives. Energized fences are the best long-term control measure for these situations. These fencing systems will prevent wildlife damage when installed and maintained properly. If damage occurs, contact your local DNR Area Wildlife Manager or Conservation Officer immediately for technical recommendations.

Beehives protected by energized fencing system.

**Relocating or Destroying Bears**

Sometimes a bear causing problems must be relocated or destroyed. These methods should be used only after exhausting all other options. Your local DNR Area Wildlife Manager may relocate a bear if he or she determines this is the best solution. Bears will not be relocated for causing minor property damage, such as tearing down bird feeders or tipping over garbage cans. Relocated bears seldom remain where they are released. They may return to where they were caught or become a problem somewhere else.

When a bear must be killed, the DNR can assign a licensed hunter or issue a special permit to shoot it. A person may kill a bear to protect their property, however this option should be used only if the bear is causing immediate danger or significant property damage. Bears are the property of the State of Minnesota. The killing of a problem bear must be reported to a Conservation Officer within 48 hours.